

*Comprehension questions on...*

# **SOMETIMES GLADNESS**

**By  
Bruce Dawe**

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**WORKSHEET 1: POETRY RESPONSE**

- ◆ This worksheet may be used to work on any poem. Choose some of Dawe's poetry and answer the following focus questions.
1. Paraphrase the poem stanza by stanza.
  2. Is the poem lyric or narrative, OR...?
  3. Underline unfamiliar words or phrases and brainstorm or discuss these with your class mates.
  4. How is the poem organized? What impact does this have on the poem?
  5. What poetic devices are used, if any? To what effect?
  6. What is the tone of the poem?
  7. Describe the overall mood of the poem. How is it created?
  8. What is your personal response to the poem? Discuss.



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**WORKSHEET 2: “Enter without so much as knocking”**

1. How does the opening of the poem introduce the poem’s major themes?
2. List and evaluate the poetic devices Dawe uses in this poem.
3. Is the poem making any social statements?
4. To what effect is humour used throughout the poem?
5. In what ways is each stanza unique and different?
6. What is the impact of the last line of the poem?
7. Discuss the use of irony in this poem.

**“And a Good Friday was had by all”**

1. How does the poem explore spirituality?
2. Discuss the tone of this poem and how it is achieved.
3. What language does Dawe use throughout the poem? Discuss how it contributes to the whole of the poem.
4. How effective is the imagery used in this poem?
5. Are there any political overtones in this poem? If so, what are they?
6. Discuss the poem’s progress through each stanza.

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**WORKSHEET 3: “Condolences of the season”**

1. What is the significance of the title?
2. Explore the humour in the poem.
3. How are genders treated by this poem? Is there a difference? Explain why that may be so.
4. Provide examples of how Dawe establishes a link or camaraderie with his son.
5. Describe the tone of the poem and how it is achieved.

**“The family man”**

1. What is this poem exploring? Who is this poem for?
2. How significant is the title?
3. Why do you think Dawe chooses to focus on the reactions of others? What is revealed?
4. For what purpose has Dawe used cliches etc.? What is he saying?
5. What questions does the poem leave us asking?
6. How do the stanzas of the poem contrast and to what effect?
7. Why is the poem so powerful?

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**WORKSHEET 4: “A Victorian hangman tells his love”**

1. Describe the overall tone of this poem. How does Dawe achieve this?
2. Why did Dawe choose to write about Ronald Ryan?
3. How effective is the bridegroom metaphor?
4. What is the impact of the dramatic opening? What makes it so memorable?
5. Describe the language used in this poem.
6. Find out information about capital punishment in Australia and the attitude people had when Ronald Ryan was hanged.

**‘KATRINA’**

1. Describe the tone and mood of this poem and how it is achieved.
2. What is the impact of the writing being aimed directly at Katrina?
3. Analyse the language used by Dawe and how it shapes our reaction to the poem.
4. What did you think of this poem? Explain.

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**WORKSHEET 5: "LIFE CYCLE"**

1. Who is this poem aimed at?
2. Discuss the use of satire and comedy used by Dawe.
3. What is the overall mood of the poem?
4. Why are there so many religious references?
5. What did you think of this poem? Explain.

**'DRIFTERS'**

1. Discuss the tone and language of this poem.
2. How does the conclusion of the poem highlight the end of life as they have known it.
3. To what effect does Dawe use poetic elements in this poem?



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**WORKSHEET 6: 'HOMECOMING'**

1. Comment on the significance of the title, HOMECOMING.
2. How does Dawe capture army life and war? What conclusions does he want us to make?
3. This poem is written as a lament format. Find another Dawe poem that is similar.
4. What have the dead become in this poem? Why?
5. In what tempo is this poem written? Does it affect our reading of the poem?
6. Analyse Dawe's use of language .

**THE RAPED GIRL'S FATHER'**

1. Discuss the significance of the title.
2. What is happening to the girl throughout this poem?
3. What is Dawe trying to show us by focussing on the father's reaction?
4. Discuss the impact of the last six lines of this poem.
5. How does Dawe use imagery to reconnect us with the true victim?



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**WORKSHEET 7: 'THE ROCK -THROWER'**

1. What is the subject matter of this poem?
2. Discuss Dawe's use of humour and irony throughout the poem.
3. How does the poem view the rock-thrower?
4. Describe the picture Dawe paints of suburbia. What is he really saying about suburban life?
5. What language and expressions does Dawe use to recreate the characters in the poem?
6. How do the stanzas progress and differ?

**'Homo Suburbiensis'**

1. Can you see yourself or someone you know in this poem?
2. Discuss the tone of the poem and how it is achieved.
3. Explore the language and humour of the poem.
4. What social statements does this poem make?

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**WORKSHEET 8: RELATIONSHIPS**

1. List the significant characters in a selection of Bruce Dawe's poetry, and the relationships they are in.
2. Describe each relationship.
3. What are the consequences of each relationship?
4. Look at each relationship and pinpoint any major turning points and changes for each relationship.
5. For each relationship, ask yourself whether it is a life giving or negative relationship. Discuss your answers.
6. For each character, choose a key phrase or line that summarizes who they are and the relationships they are living.
7. What is Bruce Dawe saying about relationships?



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## WORKSHEET 9: MAJOR THEMES

All texts explore central or key ideas. These are called themes, or the big concerns of the text or film. Common themes may include love, loss, freedom and so on. It is essential that you are aware of the key themes of your texts, and how you came to the conclusion. Support this with examples of key scenes, turning points and quotes.

On a sheet of paper, rule up as per below and fill in your findings.

### KEY THEMES                      Poems and lines to support this

#### ◆ Some themes for DAWE'S POETRY

##### ◆ Australian identity and culture

See:     *'The family man'*  
          *'Suburban lovers'*  
          *'The Rock-Thrower'*  
          *'Up the Wall'*  
          *'Home Suburbiensis'*

##### ◆ Personal vs political

See:     *'The flashing of badges'*  
          *'Then'*  
          *'Doctor to patient'*

##### ◆ Human frailty

See:     *'Nemesis'*  
          *'Burial Ceremony'*  
          *'What lies on us'*  
          *'Elegy for drowned children'*

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## **WORKSHEET 10: CHARACTERS**

Spend some time re-reading Dawe's poetry to meet some of the characters in his poetry. Are there recurring types?

In your book, allow one paragraph per character. Based on the following questions, create an in depth character study.

1. Pick a key character from the poem.
2. Write a physical description for this character.
3. Describe the character's personality.
4. What happens to him/her? (Briefly)
5. What motivate/s this character? What is his/her driving force?
6. Describe this character's attitude to life.
7. What major events and turning points are faced by this character. How are they handled?
8. Describe changes and/or transformations experienced.
9. What problems are faced by this character, and how are they handled?
10. Discuss the relationships this character has with others.
11. How does this character use language?
12. Is the character's gender important in his/her life?
13. Why is this character the way he/she is?
14. What important past experiences have shaped this character?

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**WORKSHEET 11: CREATIVE RESPONSES**

1. Write some of your own poetry inspired by the poems in Bruce Dawe's SOMETIMES GLADNESS.
2. Spend some quiet time reading and focusing on Dawe's poems. Choose one that most appeals to you and create a visual response to it. This might be a piece of clay work, colours on a large sheet of paper, a montage etc.
3. Write a letter to Bruce Dawe outlining what you think of him as a writer. Make references to some of his poems.
4. Learn one of Dawe's poems by heart and present it to the class as a reading, with appropriate music. You may like to add costume or special lighting. (Note: it does not have to be expensive; try candles – with your teacher's approval, or even cheap arc lights.) Most of all, you should aim to convey the tone of the poem.
5. Take a series of photographs inspired by Dawe's poetry. Mount them and display them at school. Give each photograph a title and write a brief explanation linking it to Dawe's poetry.
6. If your school has the facilities, plan, create and film a short surreal video exploring one of Dawe's poems. Include appropriate music.
7. Choose one or more poems from Dawe's collection and turn it into a short story or short play.

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**WORKSHEET 12: ESSAY QUESTIONS**

1. Bruce Dawe has encapsulated the spirit of Australia in SOMETIMES GLADNESS? Discuss.
2. Dawe's poetry laments the passing away of our unique Australian culture. Discuss.
3. Dawe's ability to highlight the extraordinary in the ordinary is his special gift to Australian literature. Discuss.
4. In SOMETIMES GLADNESS, Dawe constantly demonstrates that the political and personal are inextricably bound. Discuss.
5. Dawe's poetry is populated by isolated, alienated and emotionally repressed individuals desperately clamouring to be set free, but not quite making it. Discuss.
6. Ultimately, Dawe's poetry is a revelation and exploration of our human frailties, which makes it all the more universal. Discuss.
7. Dawe's poetry reveals a unique mastery of language, all the more powerful because it is so easily understood by all. Discuss.
8. It is Dawe's sense of humour that is so refreshing and rare in poetry of this standard. Discuss.

